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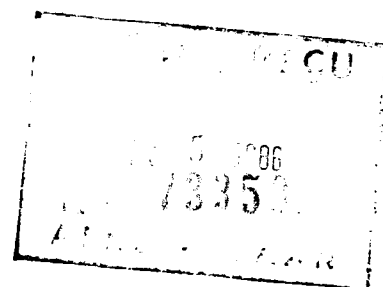


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FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH SOCIO - ECONOMICS Monitoring Tour / Workshop

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ISSUES AND METHODOLOGY: WOMEN IN FARMING SYSTEMS RESEARCH

Discussant Paper

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Discussant Paper on
"Issues and Methodology: Women in Farming Systems Research"

Kenneth T. MacKay*

The consideration of Women in Farming Systems Research (FSR) is very important. It is obvious that in the past:

- (1) Some interventions have failed because of a poor understanding of the role of women in the farming systems.
- (2) Technology is not gender neutral. Some technologies have been introduced and adopted which have had a negative impact on the role of women.
- (3) Interventions can be made much more effective if we know much more about gender roles. Answers to questions such as who will use the technology/ intervention, who will it affect and who decides on the adoption, will be very useful in approving the efficiency of the intervention.

The most important point that Dr Laufer makes and one with which I agree is the central role of the household. I like her concept of the farm household decision making as a complex bargaining process. I think the use of decision making profiles would be very useful in FSR. Also, her point that household labour is not freely substitutable should be considered in any study on labour in FSR.

I further agree with the issues she raises on methodology specifically the four points (McKee, 1984) necessary to define in FSR:

- (1) What is the farming systems?
- (2) What is the household?
- (3) Who are the decision makers (this may be the central problem in gender issues)?
- (4) What are the sources of labour (e.g., household vs paid labourers, male, female, children)?

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The most serious problem I have with this paper is that part 3 - Factors Influencing Women's Productivity in Farming Systems may be irrelevant to Asia.

I agree that access to credit, markets, technology, land, etc. are important issues. However, they are not women's issues. I think they are more determined by class, caste, education, and geographic location. These issues do affect the household but I do not think they have gender specific consequences. Laufer's arguments may be valid for areas in Africa, North and South America. There female headed farms are important. Also, even on male headed farms, females will grow separate crops and market them separately. My impression in most of Asia is that the household is much more important and that there is a sharing of profits within the household. Even in female headed households there is usually a son, son-in-law, brother, etc. who plays the male role and that these farms are not cut off from services and markets. Laufer's hypothesis, however, is testable and this may be an issue worth examining at the Sta Barbara site.

I also have a couple of quibbles on specific points:

- (1) The question of who the research should address when explaining the value of feeding ipil-ipil to cattle. The women collect the leaves and feed the cattle yet the men cut ipil-ipil for firewood and sale. There may be conflict between the men's and women's activities, the important issue becomes that of how are decisions made.
- (2) Terminology - Laufer (page 11) does not use the standard IRRI terminology for the various stages of the FSR process. I am sure this has been mentioned earlier in this workshop but I would stress the need for consistency in terminology. Furthermore, while I would certainly be happy if RRA's were used more often in site description (Laufer's diagnostic phase) RRA is not synonymous with this phase as she claims.
- (3) As a training module this paper is too theoretical with too much jargon. A training module on the role of women in farming system should be an overview using the slides and scripts to sensitize the trainees to the various issues. I agree that gender issues have to be considered at each stage in FSR but the question is that of methodology. I think the key methodological questions are:
 - (a) How do you determine the household decision making process?

- (b) How do you involve women's issues in the FSR team without over-burdening it? FSR teams now have agronomist, pathologist, entomologist, economist, anthropologist, do we add another genderologist? How do these issues become integrated into the national programs where there are very few social scientists none of whom are working for the Ministries or Department of Agriculture?
- (c) How do you determine gender roles in labour activities?
- (d) How do you assess impact of technology on women in order to appropriately design and improve interventions?

I would like to give a few specific examples based on some of my recent travel which indicate some of the importance of women in FSR:

- (1) If you visit the villages in North East Thailand after 5 in the evening, you will see women returning carrying baskets of grass, weeds and tree shoots for animal feed while young teenage girls are returning with the cattle from their day's grazing in the community pasture. Women are definitely involved in livestock rearing. However, the research and intervention appear to be aimed at the men.
- (2) In Bhutan the women as in other areas of Asia are involved in transplanting and weeding rice. The Department of Agriculture has recently introduced line planting and mechanical weeding. The weeder being introduced is heavy and is being introduced to the men. How do you assess the impact of this intervention? Should the weeder be designed for and introduced to the women or to the men?
- (3) Also in Bhutan women are very much involved in livestock rearing, compost making and manure handling. They collect and carry the feed and bedding from the fields and forests. They do most of the manure handling, in fact it is taboo for men to carry manure to the field. Yet the extension agents have been introducing new compost techniques and holding facilities to men. When asked they said that they could talk to the women but not too often, that women did not make the decisions and that an older man had to be involved. Are they right? How is decision making done in Bhutan? Is it one person or a household bargaining process? Who should be involved in the technological change? Because of the very few trained personnel in Bhutan, how do you obtain answers to these questions?